

Working as an administrative assistant - An excellent choice for generalists

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ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANTS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR A WIDE RANGE OF DUTIES IN JOBS THAT ARE USUALLY WELL-SUITED TO CANDIDATES WITH MORE GENERAL BACKGROUNDS. THIS PROFILE CAN HELP YOU DECIDE WHETHER WORKING AS AN ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT IS RIGHT FOR YOU.

[Administrative assistants](#) perform clerical duties and administrative tasks to support various types of organizations, and they are employed in offices in almost every business sector. Most entry-level positions are available to those with a high school diploma and good communication and computer skills, but some administrative assistants may need specialized knowledge related to the industry they're working in.

What can you expect from an administrative assistant job?

Responsibilities

As an administrative assistant, you are responsible for a variety of clerical and organizational tasks necessary to keep your employer's business running in an efficient, organized way. Your duties will depend on your industry and the company you work for, but may include:

- Greeting visitors to workplace and attending to them during their stay
- Answering telephone, email, and social media inquiries and directing them to other employees when appropriate
- Typing workplace documents, including letters and reports
- Processing incoming and outgoing mail
- Creating and maintaining computer records
- Maintaining paper files
- Monitoring stock levels and ordering supplies as required
- Performing basic bookkeeping duties
- Booking meetings, seminars, and conferences, and organizing catering for them
- Taking minutes during business meetings

- Coordinating appointments of executives and managers
- Booking flights, hotel rooms, and restaurants for executives and managers

Work environment

Administrative assistants work in office environments in a wide variety of industries. Many are employed by **legal** and **medical** offices, **government** agencies, **schools**, hospitals, and **private** enterprises.

Many administrative assistants share offices with a collection of other **administrative professionals** or work independently in their own office spaces, usually located close to an executive they assist. Administrative assistants usually have their own computer workstation and at least one telephone on their desk. They rarely share these workstations with other company employees.

The offices administrative assistants work in are usually quiet, low-stress environments. However, these workplaces may become more stressful at times, such as close to deadlines or during tax time.

Unlike many modern business roles, it's rare for administrative assistants to telecommute. That's because their role requires them to communicate in person with a variety of staff members, company clients, and other visitors to the business.

Schedule

Administrative assistants are usually expected to work full-time hours, typically between 35 to 40 hours during weekdays. Depending on the type of company and their requirements, overtime may sometimes be required for these employees. Some businesses also employ part-time administrative assistants or offer flexible hours. These options are often extended to parents who may have to juggle their work with childcare duties.

Some organizations that operate outside traditional business hours, such as hospitals, may require their administrative assistants to work on weekends, public holidays, and late at night. Administrative assistants working these unusual hours will often have time off during the traditional business day. Working as an administrative assistant for one of these companies can suit people who prefer working nights or who have flexible lifestyles.

What qualifications are required to be an administrative assistant?

Education

There are many entry-level administrative assistant roles which only require a high school education. However, administrative assistants can give themselves a competitive edge by gaining an associate's degree or certificate which shows proven experience in:

- Database management
- Office administration
- Basic computer use, including competence with word processing, database, and spreadsheet software

The Certified Professional Secretary and the **Certified Administrative Professional** are some of the common certifications administrative assistants in the United States hold.

Administrative assistants aspiring to roles in the legal and medical fields may also complete industry-specific courses which teach more about the sector's terminology and procedures.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, it's becoming more common for employers to look for [executive-level administrative assistants with bachelor's degrees](#).

Most [administrative assistant jobs](#) also require **company-specific training** which helps new employees learn about company procedures, policies, and the usage of job-specific software and technology.

Experience

As administrative assistants do not typically require formal qualifications, experience in this role is more important than education. Consequently, new administrative assistants earn lower salaries than average. Annual salaries gradually climb throughout an administrative assistant's career. New administrative assistants make, on average, \$8,000 less every year than their peers with 20 or more years of experience.

Data shows a third of administrative assistants in the United States have between one and four years of experience in the field. A quarter of administrative assistants have five to nine years of experience and 24 percent have between 10 and 19 years of experience. Seventeen percent of administrative assistants have 20 or more years of experience working in this profession, compared to just three percent that have worked as an administrative assistant for less than a year.

These figures confirm that experienced administrative assistants are valued. Once you have proven yourself as an administrative assistant, you're likely to find many job opportunities working in similar roles for many years to come.

Skills

Administrative assistants require a variety of skills to successfully perform their duties. These are just some of the hard and soft skills employers look for in new administrative assistants:

- **Basic computer literacy** – Administrative assistants spend much of their time on computers, especially using word processing, database, and spreadsheet software and the internet. Familiarity with Microsoft Office is particularly important.
- **Organization** – Administrative assistants rely on organization and time management skills to keep schedules straight and multitask on a variety of clerical duties.

- **Written and oral communication** – In this role, administrative assistants need to speak to other staff members and visitors to the business, and compose letters, emails, and social media posts using correct grammar and spelling.
- **Personable nature** – As the point of contact for many staff members and visitors to the business, an appealing personality is essential.
- **Attention to detail** – It's vital that all tasks administrative assistants undertake are completed to a high standard without errors. You'll also call on this skill when proofreading the drafts of reports and letters you're asked to type.
- **Team player** – Administrative assistants play a vital part in the operations of any organization, so it's important for them to work well with other people in the business.
- **Self-starter** – Administrative assistants often need to use their own initiative to ensure they do not distract executive-level and management staff.
- **Strong numeracy skills** – This is especially important for administrative assistants responsible for bookkeeping.
- **Problem-solving abilities** – Administrative assistants call on these skills if clients need to cancel meetings and appointments need juggling, if supplies don't arrive on time, and other workplace emergencies arise.
- **Flexibility** – An administrative assistant's duties can vary significantly from day to day. They rely on their flexibility to adapt to the demands each day brings and excel in whatever task that's required.
- **Strong work ethic** – The work administrative assistants do is essential for their organizations' operations. It takes a strong work ethic to complete all tasks required in a timely fashion.

Salary expectations

How much do administrative assistants make? This depends on their experience and location. According to PayScale, entry-level administrative assistants typically earn around \$30,000 a year, and annual salaries increase gradually as they gain experience. On average, administrative assistants in the United States [earn approximately \\$40,000, or \\$14 an hour](#). Experienced administrative assistants in some American cities stand to earn much more than the national average. For example, the average administrative assistant in San Francisco, California, earns \$41,780. In New York City, average salaries for administrative assistants stand at \$50,500, while in Washington, D.C., average salaries for administrative assistants are \$51,000.

Job outlook for administrative assistants

Projected growth

The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics expects that jobs for administrative assistants will **grow by 3 percent** between 2014 and 2024, amounting to 118,800 new positions within this period. This is slower than the national average. The Bureau suggests administrative assistants with work experience and **computer software skills** will have the best chance of securing work in this competitive job market.

Career trajectory

As [administrative assistants](#) gain experience they may advance to more senior roles with greater responsibility. For example, an entry-level administrative assistant may become an executive administrative assistant or an [office manager](#). If you would like to advance as an administrative assistant, you should apply yourself to learning more about your company's operations and enhance your skill set with certifications or degrees.

In some cases, motivated administrative assistants may move to other departments within their organization, such as accounting or information technology. Gaining formal qualifications in one of these areas will improve an administrative assistant's chances of transitioning.

Administrative assistants who stay with the same company and learn all they can about it, rather than pursuing opportunities at different organizations, may find their loyalty rewarded with advancement opportunities.

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